**Essentialism**

Is the educational philosophy of teaching basic skills. This philosophy advocates training the mind. Essentialist educators focus on transmitting a series of progressively difficult topics and promotion of students to the next level or grade. Subjects are focused on the historical context of the material world and culture, and move sequentially to give a solid understanding of the present day. This philosophy stresses core knowledge in reading, writing, math, science, history, foreign language, and technology. The tools include lecturing, memorization, repetition, practice, and assessment.

William C. Bagley (1874–1946) was one of the most influential advocates of essentialism. Bagley believed that education was not supposed to change society but to preserve it. At a conference for the American Association of School Administrators in 1938, Bagley “urged schools and educators to create what we know today to be vigilant in sticking to the core curriculum”.

In addition to Bagley’s influence, four other occurrences have since revitalized the essentialism movement by mandating global competition. The first was the launching of Sputnik by the Soviet Union in 1957. Next, a report titled A Nation at Risk was issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education under the Reagan administration in 1983. The report claimed that our society was being “eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future [as] a nation and a people” and blamed a lack of the basic essentials in education: math, reading, writing, science, and technology

The report did little, however, to spark change, and A Nation Still at Risk, written by Jeanne Allen, was issued in 1998. The last occurrence in the promotion of essentialism was the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2005. NCLB imposed a set of laws at the federal level to monitor basic student achievement. Schools that failed to meet the required standards of achievement were flagged as needing assistance or remediation and were liable to lose their federal aid or to be forced to cease operations without further improvements.

Essentialism is a common model in U.S. public schools today. A typical day at an essentialist school might have seven periods, with students attending a different class each period. The teachers impart knowledge mainly through conducting lectures, during which students are expected to take notes. The students are provided with practice worksheets or hands-on projects, followed by an assessment of the learning material covered during this process. The students continue with the same daily schedule for a semester or a year. When their assessments show sufficient competence, they are promoted to the next grade or class to learn more difficult material. For each class, the school board has approved a specific curriculum, which must be taught, although how it is taught is left to the teacher’s discretion.

Essentialists believe that there is a common core of knowledge that needs to be transmitted to students in a systematic, disciplined way. The emphasis in this conservative perspective is on intellectual and moral standards that schools should teach. The core of the curriculum is essential knowledge and skills and academic rigor. Although this educational philosophy is similar in some ways to Perennialism, Essentialists accept the idea that this core curriculum may change. Schooling should be practical, preparing students to become valuable members of society. It should focus on facts-the objective reality out there--and "the basics," training students to read, write, speak, and compute clearly and logically. Schools should not try to set or influence policies. Students should be taught hard work, respect for authority, and discipline. Teachers are to help students keep their non-productive instincts in check, such as aggression or mindlessness. This approach was in reaction to progressivist approaches prevalent in the 1920s and 30s. William Bagley, took progressivist approaches to task in the journal he formed in 1934. Other proponents of Essentialism are: James D. Koerner (1959), H. G. Rickover (1959), Paul Copperman (1978), and Theodore Sizer (1985)